

THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The new democratic dispensation in Nigeria was launched again in 1999 leading to the emergence of the fourth republic. This came after a long time of despotic military rule in the country. Democracy was highly embraced by all with expected hope that it will deliver good dividends and socioeconomic development. But not far into the fourth republic, the body polity became overheated by lots of challenges namely: corruption, electoral abnormalities, the politics of godfatherism, incessant poverty reinforced by mass unemployment, security question etc. These challenges are strongly affecting democratic stability and consolidation. The analysis of the above challenges is the mainstream of this paper.

Keywords: Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Fourth Republic

Introduction

Democracy has been described as government by persons freely chosen by the governed who also hold them accountable and responsible for their actions while in government (Ghana, 1996:12). A democratic system is one where rulers are held accountable to the ruled by means of a variety of political arrangements. Such arrangements include but are necessarily conterminous with, competitive multi-party elections held at regular intervals (Oronsaye, 1995:1).

However, the main attribute of democracy is that, those holding political office do not have automatic security of tenure but can be challenged and even displaced in accordance with the will of the people through a wide range of institutional mechanism. Thus, the core ideas and ingredients defining democracy are participation and accountability; that the people determine who govern them, and that those who govern give account of their stewardship

through periodic election is one of the most important mechanisms for the realization of the objectives of democratization. It is also important to note that, elections are not only meant to ensure, confirm or re-affirm the legitimacy of the governors through a regular consent, but also to provide a fertile ground for democracy to thrive (Ogundiya and Baba T.K., 2007).

This paper will therefore address the challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria with key emphases in the ongoing democratic republic.

Conceptual clarification

Democracy

Apart from being a subject of global concern, the concept democracy is particularly sensitive to the current socioeconomic and political circumstances of nations striving for international identity and developmental posture as well as liberality and good governance.

As an over-flogged concept, the idea as enunciated by the ancient Greeks means “demos cratos” which is literally translates into “people’s power or rule” (Sarabjit, 2002:2). That goes to show that democracy has its root in Greek where individuals in a polls have an opportunity of taken part in decision making. The position explains democracy as a universal principle of governance that upholds high moral imperatives, accord the citizenry the right to participate m decision making that adheres to their collective will and interest, as opined by Ntalaja (2000).

The concept can therefore be regarded as a governmental system that involves the widest spectrum of participation, either through elections or through the administration of the accepted policies. It is a government founded on the principle of rule of law which is against arbitrariness, highhandedness, dictatorship and also antithesis to military regime.

Democratic Consolidation

Diamond (1999) sees democratic consolidation as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation such that all significant political actors believe that popular rule is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. It also connects the act of reducing the probability of the breakdown of the system to the point where democracy can be said that it will persist. Some scholars view it as regime maintenance and about regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game. It manifest under enhanced economic development, developed democratic culture, stable party system, suffice to assert that this cannot be attained in Nigeria until stability is attained. This therefore shows that though under democratic regime, Nigeria is striving for consolidation.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts “liberal theory of democracy” in examining the challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. The liberal theory of democracy is said to be common among capitalist and peripheral capitalist nations. This notion of democracy emerged when capitalism became the dominant mode of production in Europe and North America supported philosophical writing of John Locke, J.J. Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Montesquieu and other Liberal writers whose theories advocate private liberty, natural rights, social justice, majority rule and private property (Oddih, M.2007). Based on this premise, basic features of liberal democratic theory are:

- a. acceptance of capitalism
- b. free, fair and periodic elections based on universal franchise.
- c. emphasis on civil liberties or individual rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, press and religion
- d. competitive party system as oppose to one party system
- e. pressure groups.
- f. rule of law
- g. separation of powers and checks and balances
- h. abhorrence of revolutionary approach to change the government.

The central idea of the liberal bourgeois theory of democracy is how to design a political system which encourages individual participation and enhances moral development of citizens. Liberal democracies usually have universal suffrage, granting all adult citizens the right to vote regardless of race, gender or property ownership. Liberal democracy may take various constitutional forms: it may be a federal republic, as the United States, Brazil, India and Germany, or a constitutional monarchy such as the United Kingdom, Japan, or Spain. It may also be a presidential or a parliamentary system.

This theory is justified due to the fact that, it can help examine analytically the challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic as it designs the systematic structure through which a democratic political system can effectively function. Liberal theory of democracy is an interesting theory in this work. Its value lies in the fact that it exposes and explains the expectation of any political system, especially as it emphasizes the conduct credible elections which is one of the factors responsible for consolidating democracy.

Critique

“Liberal Democracy” does not respect the absolute majority rule (except when electing representatives). The Liberty of majority rule is restricted by the constitution or

precedent decided by previous generations. Also, the real power is actually held by a relatively small representative

The argument goes thus, “Liberal Democracy” is merely a decoration over an oligarchy. Some Marxists Socialists and Left-wing Anarchists, argue that, liberal democracy is an integral part of the capitalist system. Therefore, it is a class-based and not democratic or participatory. The cost of political campaigning in representative democracies favors the rich (Morton, 2004).

Modern Democracy has also been criticized by non-democratic socialists as an honest force used to keep the masses from realizing that there will be irrelevant in the political process. Liberal Democracy notwithstanding the criticisms averred by critique is by and large significant in this work.

Although other theories such as Liberal Marxists theory, Classical theory of democracy, Political economy theory and Group theory respectively, have been used to analyze democracy, none is sufficient to examine democratic consolidation better than the liberal theory in this study.

Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Nigeria’s democracy landed on a good platform with the existence of democratic institutions, plural society, vibrant civil society organizations and critical mass media among others. These ingredients have the structure and capacity to make democracy thrive in Nigeria. But it is germane to note that, Nigeria’s democracy has remained grossly unstable since the return to this popular form of governance in 1999. The political terrain has been home with lots of challenges precipitating against the genuine realization of the system. In fact the impediments to the nations unending desire for a true democracy seem to assume a more perilous proportion by the day. These challenges are:

Ethno-religious factor: this remains one of the forces that have contributed greatly to socio-political instability in the country. The latest sectarian turbulence in the country and the clamor for the presidency by the varied ethnic groups indicate that the society is still Balkanized by tribal and religious sentiments (Victor, 2002). Each ethnic nationality in Nigeria has its own faith, interest, culture, language and level of aspiration and these forces seems to affect the economic fate of each group. In addition, they make the creation of a common identity problematic, thereby exacerbating the difficulty in attaining a true democracy in the society. Currently, Nigeria lacks the necessary democratic values (civil and human abuse is rampant, freedom of speech and expression is hampered, lack of social security and distributive justice) hence the rampant social unrest in the polity (Victor, 2002).

The absence of true federalism: lack of true federal structure in Nigeria is a stumbling block to the nation's ongoing democratic enterprise. The federal government is very overbearing as it controls about 80% of the country's resources leaving state and local governments at its mercy. Where regions, states or geographical zones have the power to control their resources and to have access to the necessary funds for community development programs, democracy thrives. 'In fact, it is only true federalism that can guarantee fairness and justice in the society. More importantly, it enables each locality to progress according to the aspiration of the people. A durable and enforceable people's constitution is an indispensable tool to make this feasible, as the constitution protects the people and determines socio-political activities in a society. As noted in the philosophy of Aristotle "we can decide the identity of a state only by examining the form (and contents) of its constitution". In Nigeria we lack the reality of such a federal constitution and true federal state (AWUUDU, 2012).

Abject Poverty: continued poverty, reinforced by mass unemployment is a barrier to Nigeria's quest for consolidating her democracy. A society of beggars, parasites and bandits cannot develop. It cannot know peace or stability and cannot be democratic (Ake, 1996). This shows that any individual deprived of the basic wherewithal cannot participate effectively in a democratic process. A poor person is therefore not a full fledged social individual, as he/she lacks the basic freedom to engage in the life he/she enjoys. One can safely argue that poverty is a hindrance to democratic consolidation since economic chaos can topple democratic institutions. The problems of poverty and injustice are good part of Nigeria, and the citizens do not seem to understand what is in their culture preventing them from achieving a just, prosperous-dignified life and true democracy. It is essential to note that about 70% of the Nigerian populations are estimated poor. Is there any wonder why the society is chaotic? (Victor, 2002). The consequence of the above estimation substantiates how the masses in Nigeria are easily brainwashed and their right of choice terribly manipulated making an objective choice seldom to consideration. And more often than not, various forms of inducements and gratification which provide very temporary relief from the scourge of poverty are given central attention in making democratic choices.

Disjointed information: mass media as watchdog of the public interest is very crucial to democratic consolidation. The media is democratically seen as vanguard for holding governments accountable and guarding against the abuse of power. This can be done by raising countervailing structures of surveillance to monitor government activities and stem an inherent disposition towards excess. But in Nigeria especially in this republic, there are

constraints on press media resulting in suppression of information, provision of disjointed and half hazard information and thereby limiting the capacity of individuals to develop a reservoir of political knowledge to assist them in controlling authoritarian rule and participating adequately in political activities. Our media has been subsumed into the elite structure “the big man” syndrome or “upper body structure”. This is actively inimical to the survival and deepening of democracy (Awuudu, 2012).

The Incumbency Factor: In political parlance, incumbency refers to holders of political office who enjoy certain privileges (such as wider media coverage and security) which are not available to other contestants in the electoral contest. These privileges create some electoral margin for the incumbent running for re-election leading to an incumbency abuse factor. In Nigeria, this factor promotes appointment of corrupt and or compromised electoral officers, manipulation of the electoral law and the constitution, manipulation of the electoral tribunals to protest stolen mandates, use of state security forces and apparatus to intimidate opposition parties, denial of access to state owned media houses etc to ensure they regain or elongate their tenure against popular will (Jaja & Aumona, 2011:125). This is purely anti democracy

The politics of godfatherism: another great impediment to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the phenomenon of godfatherism which has been dominating the political scene of the country. It is a game where political kingmakers and gladiators manipulate the political system to enthrone their crowned political stewards. Ogundiya (2010:237) asserts that Godfatherism is both a symptom and a cause of the violence and corruption that together permeates the political process in Nigeria. Public officials who owe their positions to the efforts of a political godfather incur a debt that they are expected to repay without end throughout their tenure in office. They control state resources and policies not minding the corporate existence of the state. In fact their activities help frustrate the basic democratic values in society and block the democratic process by obstructing selection of good and qualified candidates for elective posts thereby making the rise of true democracy a hard nut.

Corruption: according to John Campbell, USA Ambassador to Nigeria; corruption is a clog in the wheel of any nation struggling for the enthronement and consolidation of democracy and good governance (Punch July 7th, 2005). This shows that democracy cannot be predicted on a fragile and unstable political base. Corruption as a devastator has greatly eroded the fundamental values of democracy and its essential principles.

Corruption in its popular conception is defined as the exploitation of public position, resources and power for private/’selfish gain. For instance, Dobel (1978) defined corruption

as “the betrayal of public trust for individual or group gain”. In a similar vein, Obayelu (2007) identifies it as “efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means for private gain at public expense, or a misuse of public power for private benefits”.

According to Ogundiya (2010), events in Nigeria since 1999 have shown that the tidal waves of reversal have been contending with Nigeria’s democratic project. Consequently, democracy remains grossly unstable and the future seems to be very bleak because of rampant bureaucratic and political corruption. Corruption has reached a high crescendo such that an average Nigerian now possibly associates democracy with it. The consequences of political corruption are potently manifest: cyclical crisis of legitimacy, fragile party structure, institutional decay, chronic economic problem and unemployment, and above all general democratic volatility.

Corruption in this country is generally characterized by Looting of funds and wealth kept secretly, i.e. capital flight; misappropriation and mismanagement of public funds; money laundering (acquiring money through fraudulent ways); drug and child trafficking; illegal arms deal; gratification which involves monetary, material or physical favor as a condition or reward for performing official duty, official abuse of office in which an official suppresses and violates an oath of office and nepotism which is granting underserved favors to one’s relations. The recent corruption scandal in the oil sector totaling N1.7 trillion from 1999-2011, Police Pension Fund of ₦18 billion as well as the James Ibori N450 billion corrupt case of money laundering in London is just the tip of an iceberg as far as corruption is concern in Nigeria.

Security question: from 1999-date, the country has been home with lots of ethno-religious crisis, sectarian mayhem, electoral violence etc. questioning and shaking the survival of democracy. Notable among them are, the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani disturbance in Shagamu, Lagos State (1999-2000), the Urohbo/Ife Modakeke crisis (2000-2001), the Jukun/Tiv conflict (2000), incessant turbulence in Jos the erstwhile home of peace and tourism, the post election violence in the Northern part of Nigeria (2011) and constant sectarian turmoil exemplified by the activities of Boko Haram. The x-ray of the above upheavals will indicate that, our democracy is surely under great challenge making Dauda and Avidime (2007) to argue that the current security situation in the country is a major obstacle to the consolidation of democracy. According to them, “the tense security situation in all parts of the country makes nonsense of whatever efforts has been made to justify the sustenance of our democratic experiment since the environment is unconducive for foreign investments and endangered by bad governance and political instability”.

Multiple electoral challenges, credible periodic election are a crucial factor in the survival of any political system and the conduct of free and fair election is the beauty of a democratic structure. This is because it makes electoral activities meaningful and the interest of the electorates represented. But in Nigeria especially in this fourth republic, elections have become a tool for promoting the interest of the aristocrat rather than the electorates. The philosophical basis and fundamental ethos of democracy are being swept under the carpet making the Nigerian electorates to lose faith in the electoral process and the government.

Analytically, the 2003 and 2007 general elections were adjudged to be worst elections in the history of fourth republic. This is because the elections were characterized by; massive rigging, monetization factor, assassination, political thuggery, sentiments, corrupt practices of electoral officers, judicial injustice, deliberate disfranchisement of the populace, discountenancing of the electorate's vote, outright disregard for the rule of law, political iniquities, etc. What the above implies is that the legitimacy of democracy as the best form of governance has been corroded.

Some of the Rigging Methods used in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 General Elections in Nigeria

For record purposes, the National Conscience Party (NCP) finds it necessary to itemize some of the despicable methods utilized by Some politicians in subverting the popular will of the Nigerian People. We are in a position to elaborate fully on each of the vile procedures adopted by the criminals but find it sufficient here to do no more than an enumeration of some of them, as follows:

1. Recognition of non-existing polling units by INEC and allocation of voting materials to same.
2. Bribing of INEC officials, the police and security agents with irresistible amounts to perpetrate election rigging.
2. Use by INEC of partisan party supporters as electoral officers to man Polling Stations.
3. Diversion of electoral materials to private offices, residence and palaces of traditional rulers for manipulation and falsification.
4. Concealment or non-release of voters' register loaded with false names later used as a ghost.
5. Voters register used at polling units not numbered, thus permitting arbitrary addition of names to the register.
6. Unannounced and sudden change of location of polling stations and collation centers.
7. Pre-stuffing of ballot boxes with fake ballot papers before the day of the election.

8. Stuffing of illegal ballot boxes with illegal papers.
9. Sale of pre-stuffed ballot boxes to candidates.
10. Replacement or exchange of official ballot boxes with unofficial ballot boxes containing unofficial thumb-printed ballot papers (throwing ballot boxes into the water in riverine areas and replacing with freshly stuffed ballot boxes from illegal quarters).
11. Addition of unofficial ballot boxes to official ballot boxes containing already thumb-printed ballot papers.
12. Falsification of results and forgery of figure both at polling units and collation centers.
13. Multiple voting to which INEC officials and the police are indifferent.
14. Use of under-aged children as voters to which INEC officials and the police are indifferent.
15. Use of special ethylated spirit to clean off the so-called indelible ink of fingernails to facilitate multiple voting.
16. Use of Vaseline on the fingernails before the so-called indelible ink is applied by polling officers in order to enable easy cleansing and facilitate multiple voting.
17. Thumb printing of ballot papers by INEC officials.
18. Thumb printing of ballot papers by security agents.
19. Thumb printing of ballot papers by some domestic monitors.
20. Accumulation and use of illegally acquired voting cards to vote on election days.
21. Use of party agents as surveyors of voters' cards to facilitate impersonation and multiple voting.
22. Dressing up party agents in police uniforms to intimidate opponents at polling and collation centers.
23. Use of armed thugs to harass and intimidate opponents and rival party agents.
24. Use of police and security operatives to terrorize opponents and rival party agents.
25. Use of armed thugs, police and security operatives to intimidate party agents of rival parties to depart from polling center.
26. Party members of the ruling parties bearing INEC tags on polling days to facilitate moving from polling station to polling station and from one collation center to another with a view to rigging elections.
27. Printing and use of fake election results sheets with same numbers as authentic result sheets.

28. Forcing some party agents at gunpoint to sign forged election results.
29. Canvassing for votes at polling centers with impunity.
30. Members of the ruling parties claiming falsely to be party agents for rival political parties so as to give cover to the rigging of election results.
31. Intimidating and compelling voters, in some instances at gunpoint to vote for particular parties
32. Ruling parties compromising agents of newly registered parties by offering them bribe.
33. Exposure of voters to the full glare of party agents in the process of voting which denied voters of privacy and negated the legal requirement of secret balloting.
34. Posting of false results by INEC on its website for internet consumption that had borne with results emanating from polling centers.
35. Change of candidates for election few days before election and in some cases after election.
36. Sale of mandate to the highest bidder.
37. Use of different fingers to make imprints on ballot papers in order to prevent easy discovery of multiple voting.
38. Agents of ruling parties forcefully seizing ballot papers from voters known to have voted against the favored party and deliberate invalidation of same by making additional finger imprints.
39. Use of looted public money to bribe voters.
40. Distribution of foodstuffs and soup ingredients such as rice, garri, beans, maize, groundnut oil, maggi and other items like sugar, slippers, roofing sheets, clothing materials, etc to induce voters.
41. Refusing to count and discarding of ballot papers identified as thumb printed for political parties that are not favored, (Umaru, A, 2003).

Conclusion

Democracy was welcomed in Nigeria with high expectation and enthusiasm since it has the capacity of ensuring political stability and socioeconomic development. But this hope was soon dashed as the political landscape of the nation was turn to a battle” ground not for national survival but for extending self centric and elitist agenda. The system today lacks an agenda for the masses and their rights terribly suppressed. Instead of peace, stability, development and an egalitarian society, the nation is now characterized and marred by political instability.

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